

# HOW THE SMART FAMILY SURVIVED A TSUNAMI



Elementary  
Edition K-6



WASHINGTON MILITARY DEPARTMENT  
*Emergency Management Division*



It's breakfast time in Alaska on a bright sunny day. Suddenly the ground begins to shake. It's a powerful earthquake! The houses begin to rattle and things begin to topple over.

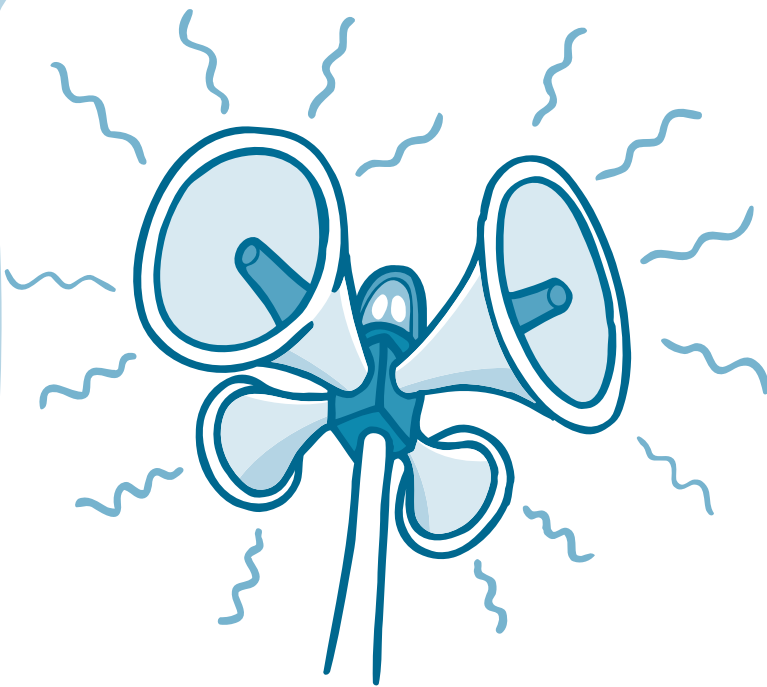
The people in the houses know the proper thing to do during an earthquake. They "drop, cover and hold" under a sturdy piece of furniture, or move up against an inside wall away from windows. The people know that running outside during an earthquake is the most dangerous thing they can do.



Once the shaking had stopped, families began to leave their homes and walk to higher ground or drive to inland areas away from the seashore, just in case a tsunami had been generated by the earthquake.



It was a typical day in Washington State when the Alaskan earthquake occurred. The Smart family had just finished breakfast. McKenzie and Cassidy were getting ready for school, and Mom was getting Macie ready to go to daycare. No one in the household had heard about the earthquake in Alaska. They didn't know a tsunami might be coming.



However, scientists at the Pacific Warning Center near Honolulu knew about the earthquake. Seismographs at the Pacific Warning Center told the scientists exactly where the earthquake took place off the Alaskan coast and how big it was.

The scientists quickly sent out a Tsunami Watch for the Washington coast, telling everyone that the Alaskan earthquake was big enough to start a tsunami moving across the Pacific Ocean in all directions. Because of that early warning, the people along the coast of Washington had a lot of time to prepare and evacuate to higher ground.



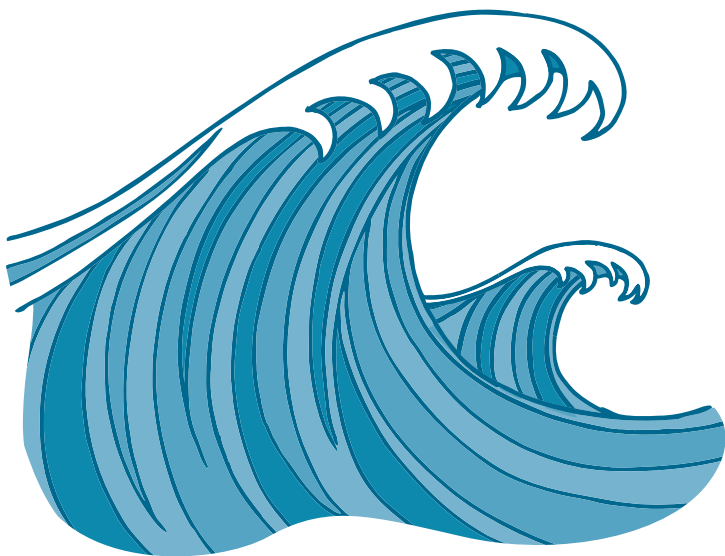
Fortunately the Smart family heard the alert siren and turned on their NOAA Weather Radio. They heard that a tsunami was approaching the Washington coast.

They quickly gathered their disaster supplies and began the journey to higher ground, away from the coast.



Out on the highway, the evacuation routes had been clearly marked with blue and white signs. The Smart family had seen those signs soon after they were put up and had become familiar with the evacuation routes to higher ground. They knew exactly what to do and where to go.

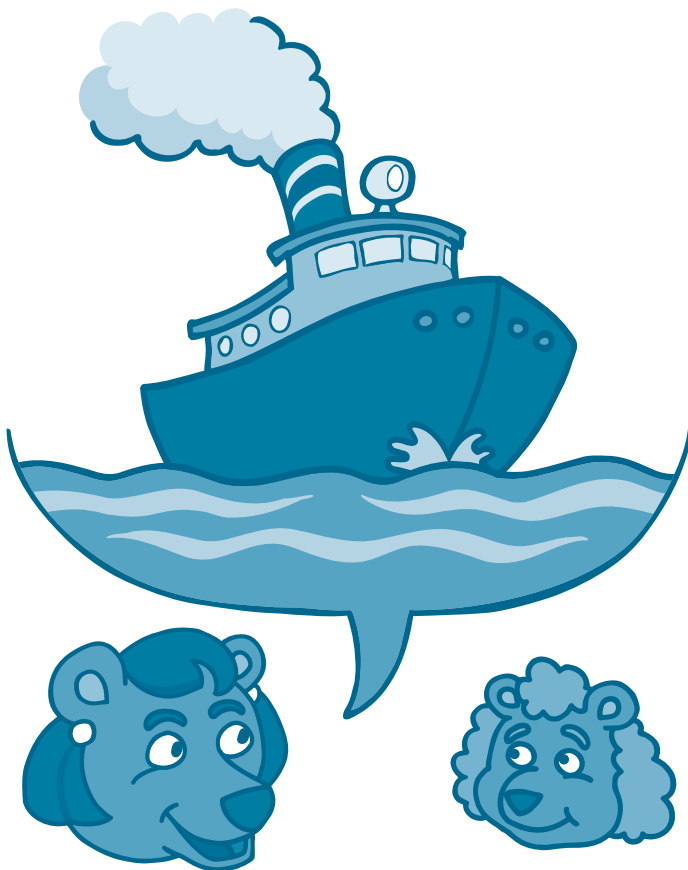
McKenzie asked her Dad, "What is a tsunami?" Her Dad said, "A tsunami is a series of waves most commonly caused by an earthquake beneath the sea floor."



Tsunamis can occur at any time of the day or night, under any and all weather conditions, and in all seasons. A strong off-shore earthquake may generate a tsunami.

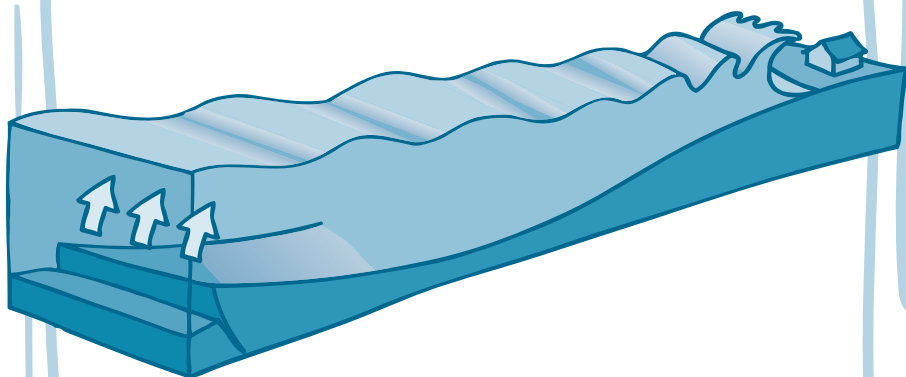
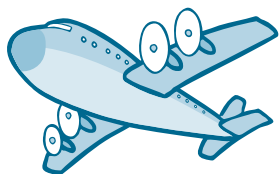
Dad said, “If we feel the ground shake, we must evacuate inland or move to high ground immediately. Sometimes, when an earthquake occurs far away, like in Alaska, we are notified by the Emergency Alert System siren, or over NOAA Weather Radio.”





Kassidy asked her Mom, “Can big ships out in the ocean feel the tsunami?”

Her Mom responded, “No, people on big ships cannot feel a tsunami, and people in airplanes cannot see a tsunami.”



Actually, out in the deep ocean, far from land, the waves are not very large, but as the tsunami approaches land, the waves become larger and more dangerous. A small wave only 12 inches high out in the deep ocean may grow into a monster wave 100 feet high as it reaches a shore line.



McKenzie told her Mom, “We learned what to do if a tsunami is approaching while we’re in school. School buses will come and take us to higher ground where we’ll be safe far away from the coastal shores. If the buses can’t come, we will start walking, very quickly, up the hill until we are safe. Miss Julie, our teacher, will take care of us until our parents come for us. Last month we had a tsunami drill and we had an earthquake drill, too.”



Up on the hill, the Smart family and others from their town had gathered in shelters. They knew that police and firemen were checking their town to make sure no one was left behind. They could hear the sirens wailing, and knew the first tsunami waves would soon arrive. Pretty soon the sirens stopped, but they all knew they must wait until after the tsunami waves stopped.

There were five waves with this tsunami and they arrived every hour for about five hours.

Meanwhile, everyone stayed in the shelter and waited for the official “all clear.” Macie saw many of her friends and their families at the shelter.



Later in the day the official “all clear” was announced over the radio in the shelter, and on their NOAA Weather Radio. This meant that the danger of the tsunami was over. The Smarts left the shelter and drove back to town to find everything just fine in their home.

However, many buildings in their town had suffered damage during the tsunami. The school was flooded, and Mr. Dan, the school principal, had begun cleaning up.



Before the tsunami arrived, many boats had gone out to sea for safety. But those that stayed in port were tossed up on shore, and many were destroyed.

For days after the tsunami, people were busy cleaning up their homes and offices. But no one had been hurt. Everyone had moved to higher ground when they heard the sirens and the tsunami warning on their NOAA Weather Radio.



That night back in their home, the Smarts were watching a TV program featuring the Emergency Manager from their local Emergency Management Office. He said everyone had done very well during the tsunami.

For future safety, the TV newsman reviewed the things people must do when an earthquake occurs near the coast.

- **Drop, Cover and Hold.**
- Get under a sturdy object and hold on.
- When the shaking is over, move to high ground or inland. Do not wait for an official warning.
- Be alert for aftershocks, and stay away from the coast. Waves may continue to arrive for hours.
- Listen to your local radio or NOAA Weather Radio for an official “*all clear*” notice before returning to the coastal area.

## **Be Prepared for Disasters**

Before future disasters, he encouraged families to:

- Develop a family disaster plan and practice the plan frequently.
- Gather together supplies, water, and enough food to be on their own for at least three days.







“Well kids, it’s time for bed,” said their Mom.

As McKenzie, Kassidy and Macie got ready for bed, they knew they were safe because their family took time to plan for a disaster. They had talked about the things that could happen and then created and practiced their safety plan.

This booklet will help children prepare for disasters. Knowledge is power, and knowing what to expect and what to do will increase their confidence when disasters occur.

For more information about earthquake and tsunami safety, please contact your local emergency management office.